

Changes in Fishing Regulations

By Greg Freeman

While some anglers lament the slow melt of the winter fishing season, a sure cure is open water and the prospect of a promising spring bite.

As anglers enjoy the fruits of year-round fishing in North Dakota, April 1 does signify the official opening day of the new fishing year. With that brings the need for a 2006-07 license, and the beginning of a new two-year proclamation.

A new proclamation often brings change. North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries biologists started formulating the 2006-08 fishing proclamation more than a year ago. Public input was sought, most notably at Department advisory board meetings around the state last year, to fashion new regulations that will help sustain North Dakota's fisheries for years to come.

Greg Power, Game and Fish Department fisheries chief, said the changes were typical of a new proclamation, no more or no less. "We are able to see what transpires over a two-year period, and with public input are able to make sound management decisions for the next proclamation," he said.

Panfish limits received considerable attention the past year. Anglers have been increasingly concerned about overharvest, Power said, and scientists had enough biological information to support a reduction to 20 fish daily and 80 in possession, down from 35 and 175. "Public support for the reduction was very strong," he said. "In essence, the decrease will spread the resource out over a longer time, and hopefully in some cases increase fishing participation."

Three state waters saw additional restrictive daily and possession limits. Yellow perch at Kraft Slough (Sargent County), yellow perch and bluegill at Odland Dam (Golden Valley County) and crappie at Pipestem Reservoir (Stutsman County) will see limits of 10 and 20 fish. "The intent is to reduce harvests to maintain these as quality fisheries," Power said, while noting the Department received strong public support for this move.



Bluegill

White bass

Crappie

Yellow perch

CRAIG BHRLE

In addition, Kraft Slough is closed to fishing from April 1 until freeze-up each fishing year. "Kraft Slough is open only to ice fishing," Power said. "It is a new fishing lake, and all parties agreed that we should be conservative in regulations. We'll assess angler impacts and modify regulations over time."

Six lakes have been added to the list of waters open to darkhouse spearfishing. Lake Irvine (Ramsey County), Island Lake (Rolette County), Sibley Lake (Griggs County), South Eckelson (Barnes County), Stump Lake (Nelson County) and Sunday Lake (Stutsman County) join lakes open to spearers from December 1 through the end of February. "After assessing all the northern pike lakes in the state, it was determined six more lakes could potentially handle more harvest," Power said.

However, the number of days allowed for darkhouse spearfishing at Spiritwood Lake (Stutsman County) has been reduced. "Opening day for spearing on this lake will be January 1," Power said. "Spiritwood Lake is the only lake in the state where there has been conflict between those who darkhouse spearfish and traditional anglers. There is some history that may suggest overharvest is an issue, but it is debatable, and eliminating December is a compromise and appears to have support from those representing both sides of this issue."

Another regulation change involves foul-hooked fish, which is defined as any fish hooked or caught in any area behind the gill covers. Possession of foul-hooked, or snagged fish, is now illegal, and any fish caught this way must be immediately released regardless of condition. This excludes paddlefish caught during the snagging season.

"The Department has received numerous complaints, especially from traditional anglers regarding ethics, over the years about individuals foul hooking fish," Power said. "This becomes an issue when fish are concentrated and can be easily snagged. Specifically, it can be an annual problem in spring in the Devils Lake basin where fish concentrate in coulees."

Along the lines of ethics, the use of any mechanical device to automatically retrieve fish is illegal, except by permission from the Game and Fish Department. "Many anglers desire to keep fishing recreational in nature and do not support some of the new gadgets intended to retrieve fish automatically," Power said.

Anglers no longer have to release trout caught in Moon Lake (Barnes County), McDowell Dam (Burleigh County) and Nygren Dam (Morton County) between April 1 and June 30. "An attempt was made the past few years to increase the larger, quality trout in select lakes across the state by requiring anglers to release trout," Power said.



"However, intended benefits never materialized, so there is no need for this restriction on these three lakes."

Likewise, Power said, the same rationale can be applied to adding Nygren Dam and Velva Sportsmen's Pond (Ward County) to lakes open to ice fishing.

The new two-year regulations, effective from April 1, 2006, through March 31, 2008, are included in the 2006-08 North Dakota Fishing Guide. Guides are available at all license vendors, county auditor offices, and Game and Fish offices, and on the Game and Fish website at gf.nd.gov.

GREG FREEMAN is the Game and Fish Department's news editor.

April 1 signifies the official open day of the new fishing year. Anglers are reminded a new fishing license is needed.



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